



Praise Notes: An Effective Part of School-wide Positive Behavior Support?

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Case Study

BACKGROUND

- BYU-Positive Behavior Support Initiative promotes a model that includes *prevention*, *early identification and intervention* at primary (school-wide), secondary (specific classes), and tertiary (individualized) levels.
- Do secondary students respond to praise notes or are they too cool to care? What are the effects of teacher praise on secondary students? If praise notes reward positive behavior, will students' negative behaviors (measured by the frequency of Office Discipline Referrals) decrease?
- Teachers were encouraged to write praise notes to promote a positive school environment and to reinforce students for enacting social skills they had been taught. In an eleven hundred student middle school, end of year data revealed a large increase in the number of written praise notes during the last two months of school. We were interested to know whether an ODR decrease occurred during the same period, and if so, was there a statistically significant relationship between praise notes written and ODR.

LITERATURE

Verbal Praise

- Praise is positive reinforcement thought to encourage desirable behavior, while extinguishing undesirable behavior (Thomas, 1991).
- Praise has been widely recommended as an important reinforcement method for teachers. It can build self-esteem, provide encouragement, and build a close relationship between student and teacher (Brophy, 1981).
- Praise can be motivational in the classroom if reinforcement is descriptive, and involves using the student's name, choosing appropriate praise words carefully and describing precisely the behavior that merits the praise (Thomas, 1991).
- Praise is most effective when it is: immediately delivered, given frequently, given enthusiastically, the teacher looks at the child, the teacher describes the behavior, and a variety of praise statements are used (Loveless, 1996).
- Praise increases students' on-task behavior (Ferguson & Houghton, 1992).

Written Teacher Praise?

- Most students (69%) preferred not to have public praise, while only 31% wanted public praise (Burnett, 2001).

CORRELATION BETWEEN OFFICE DISCIPLINE REFERRALS (ODR) AND TEACHER WRITTEN PRAISE TO STUDENTS WITH ONE ODR.

Setting: Western States middle school grades 6-7

Population: 1094 students (50% male, 90% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, 39% Free Reduced Lunch); 51 teachers

Praise Notes

- We are working with a partnering middle school to implement and improve their school-wide positive behavior support system.
- At the end of the 05-06 school year we discovered the school had a dramatic increase in written praise notes during the last two months of the school year, which more than doubled the praise notes written during the first eight months.

ODR

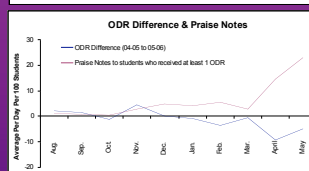
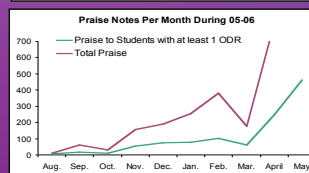
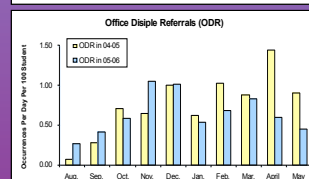
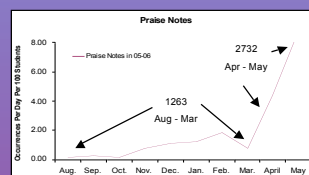
- School ODR were examined to see if there was a corresponding decrease (ODR decreased when praise notes increased).
- Monthly ODR trends for the first eight months were similar to, or worse than, ODR trends from the prior year.
- During the last two months, April and May, ODR decreased as the number of praise notes increased.

Praise and Students with ODR

- There were no statistically significant correlations between ODR and total praise notes written.
- Further examination of the praise note data revealed that students with ODR received fewer praise notes than the rest of the student body.

Correlation Between Praise Notes and ODR

- For this analysis, we used ODR from '04-'05 as baseline data, then we calculated the differences between ODR each month to account for naturally occurring variation due to school events and time lines.
- A correlation of .72 was found between teacher written praise given to students with at least one ODR and the difference between the two years of ODR (per day per 100 students; $p < .05$, $n = 10$ months).
- While these findings are retrospective, they seem to support the notion that written praise can influence students' behavior and lower ODR.



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METHOD

Prior Procedures

- Social skills posters were placed in each classroom.
- Teachers were asked to set a goal stating the number of praise notes they would write.
- Weekly drawings were held for those students who received praise notes.
- Those students who were identified in the weekly drawing were recognized during morning announcements.

Procedure Changes Preceding Praise Increase

- A drawing for faculty prizes was held in faculty meeting.
- Teachers were informed of students who had not received a praise note thus far in the school year.
- Teachers who had written more than 25 praise notes were given a gift certificate for two to a local restaurant.
- Additional gift certificates to a variety of restaurants were given to teachers when the number of praise notes written exceeded 60, 100, 150, etc.

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Can this study be replicated?
- Does teachers' recognition of positive behavior affect the teacher's attitude toward the students? Does the teacher's attitude toward students improve students' behavior and performance?
- As the school environment becomes more positive, do students with EBD experience improved behavior and academic performance?
- Teacher to teacher praise – Student to student praise?
- In a classroom where the teacher utilizes effective praise statements, does the addition of written praise notes improve students' behavior and academic success?

Limitations

- The findings of this study were found in retrospect in an attempt to discover the effects of written praise. This study should be replicated with rigorous research methods.